

**Embargoed until 5 December, 2009**

## **Dutch Sinterklaas to Meet Santa Claus – First Time in History!**

### **Official Maori Powhiri to Greet Saint Nicholas in Foxton, on his Birthday**

In the Netherlands, Sinterklaas receives an official welcome by the Mayor of Amsterdam every year, when he and his white horse arrive by steamboat in the capital – a cheerful November event that is broadcast nationwide on TV, witnessed live by 1 million or so Dutch children.

This year – on his birthday Saturday 5 December – Sinterklaas will for the very first time receive an official welcome in Aotearoa by tangata whenua, Christine Hofkens from the Dutch Embassy and other Dutch guests, and the Mayor of Horowhenua District, Brendan Duffy.

To honour local customs, Sinterklaas will be paddled in by river on a maori waka instead of a steamboat.

There are three key reasons why Sinterklaas will be greeted with a powhiri by tangata whenua:

1. The Saint will unveil the plans to establish a national Dutch Museum and Cultural Centre in Foxton, next to 'De Molen' (replica 17<sup>th</sup> century flour-grinding windmill – 30 metres high)
2. The Saint will bless the collaboration between local Maori Iwi and Dutch New Zealanders, which has led to the plans for a \$12 million '*Te Awahou – Nieuwe Stroom*' culture and heritage project
3. Sinterklaas has never yet met Hana Koko (Santa Claus / Father Christmas), since he prefers the warmer climes of Spain rather than the icy North Pole, and while in Holland usually defers to this minor dispatcher of presents as an "imposter" or a "Johnny-come-lately"...

"When you've witnessed hundreds of years of history unfold before you, like I have, then it is great to see two peoples from different parts of the world collaborate to establish an enterprise with huge future tourism potential for the region," says Sinterklaas in traditional biblical voice.

"I still clearly remember my dear friend Abel Tasman writing to me how he wanted to call this 'hoogh verheeven' (highly elevated) land 'Nieuw Zeeland'. As the first European here, he lost several sailors to Maori warriors back in 1642, just before Christmas. Today we're burying that 'bijltje' or axe. This is the historic start of a complete new beginning. The Dutch and Maori are coming together in Foxton to build a cultural facility of national significance."

"And if that means that I have to play second fiddle to Santa Claus – for once! – in a country with different festive traditions... Then so be it. I'll shake his hand and bless his undertakings!

"I am very, very glad to travel here. I will bring presents, and my Helpers will hand out traditional Dutch sweets and other gifts in Foxton, and to Dutch children around the country."

Sint and Hana Koko are set to meet by De Molen and discuss topics like ‘*best vitamin supplements for flying reindeer and roofclimbing steeds*’, and ‘*entrance and exit problems caused by modern chimneys and central heating systems*’. They will jointly delight and surprise the children of Foxton with song, humour and sweets.

### **Te Awahou – Nieuwe Stroom: A \$12 million Facility**

Sinterklaas will unveil to the nation the plans for the new \$12 million Te Awahou – Nieuwe Stroom multi-purpose facility that will be the home to a number of initiatives:

- The Dutch Connection – Museum and cultural centre
- Te Taitoa Maori o te Awahou – Maori Arts and Crafts Museum
- Horowhenua District Council’s new local Library and Community Centre
- The Save Our River Trust (SORT) – River clean up, walkways and activities
- The Flax Stripper Museum
- Tourist Information Centre: I-Site

The Te Awahou Trust is being formed to establish, by 2011, this grand community facility that is set to incorporate the roof of the existing Mitre10 building next to De Molen (see attached designs). Architect Pete Bossley, from Te Papa design fame, has produced the initial plans.

Chairman of Te Awahou Project Steering Group is Crown Prosecutor Ben van der Kolk. Ben is the Chairman of the Manfeild Trust which recently established the Manfeild events centre in the Manawatu, and the Chairman of the NetherlaNZ Foundation.

### **Fabulous Foxton Xmas Fest**

Saturday 5 December will be the first *Fabulous Foxton Christmas Fest* ever. Apart from the official Sint Welcome, from 9.30 – 10.30am on the riverside, there are lots of other activities:

- Sinterklaas mounts his white horse, to ride to De Molen and greet Santa (Hana Koko)
- Christmas carols are sung by a combined schools choir, from the skirting reef of the windmill
- Two time capsules, 20 and 40 years old, will be unearthed and re-buried
- Hangi kai will be for sale
- A market and a Dutch accordionist will provide other entertainment
- De Molen (over 30 metres high) will be open to visitors

### **The Dutch Connection / Te Taitoa Maori o Te Awahou**

The ‘Dutch Connection’ is an initiative to set up a national Dutch Museum and Cultural Centre in Foxton, next to De Molen.

The tangata whenua groups united in Te Taitoa Maori o Te Awahou will establish a Maori Arts and Crafts Museum, to display and celebrate local artists, taonga and exhibitions.

The multi-cultural *Fabulous Foxton Christmas Fest* and 5 December celebrations are hosted by the Foxton Tourist & Development Association.

**For more information about The Dutch Connection:** Arjan van der Boon, on 027 494 3658

**For more information about Te Taitoa Maori o Te Awahou:** Hayley Bell, on 027 664 3969

**For more information about the Foxton Christmas Fest:** Raewyn Perry, on 027 441 3115